



## Women in the EPS Industry: Advancing Inclusion, Skills and Innovation in Europe

## A collective commitment to inclusion

*Featuring voices from the EPS sector and beyond*

Across Europe, more and more women are actively contributing to the development and transformation of the Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) industry.

This brochure brings together the voices of professionals from within the sector and beyond who, through their expertise and dedication, are helping to shape a more inclusive, innovative and resilient industrial landscape.

Whether they are directly involved in EPS or championing the cause from related fields, each of them embodies a shared conviction: that diversity is a driving force for growth, adaptability and lasting success.

## Key contributions

**Mary Collins,**  
Secretary  
General of  
the European  
Women's Lobby



Mary Collins is currently the Acting Secretary General of the European Women's Lobby (EWL). Before this, she was the Senior Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, focusing on socio-economic issues relating to women's economic independence. In this role, she worked on the gender pay, pensions AND poverty gaps, as well as work-life balance and EU2020 Strategy/European Semester/economic governance framework from a gender perceptive. She also coordinated the EWL feminist economics working group, and in 2020 published the EWL Purple Pact - for a feminist approach to the economy.



**Kamila Gasiuk-Pihowicz, MEP,**  
Vice-chair of the  
Committee on  
the Internal  
Market and Consumer  
Protection



Kamila Gasiuk-Pihowicz is a Member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO). A qualified lawyer with a long-standing interest in justice and institutional reform, she was first elected to the Polish Sejm in 2015 and re-elected twice before joining the European Parliament in 2024.

Throughout her political career, she has been a vocal advocate for democratic accountability, the rule of law, and gender equality. She continues to support greater participation of women in economic and political life, particularly in sectors where they remain underrepresented.



European Parliament

**Roxana Ghioca,**  
CEO, Austrotherm  
Romania



Roxana Ghioca is the General Manager of Austrotherm Romania, with over a decade of experience in the EPS industry. Since joining the company as Commercial Director in 2012, she has led key areas such as sales, logistics, finance, and strategic development. In 2018, she became General Manager, overseeing Austrotherm's growth, operational efficiency, and sustainability initiatives. Under her leadership, the company has strengthened its circular economy approach by investing in recycling infrastructure and improving EPS waste collection. Known for her pragmatic and hands-on management style, Roxana works closely with her teams and partners to deliver practical, forward-looking solutions that respond to the evolving needs of the construction sector.



*We would like to thank all the professionals who took part in this publication and the organisations they represent. Their perspectives are a reminder that industrial progress and social responsibility must go hand in hand.*  
**Together, we are building a stronger, more inclusive EPS industry.**

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# Foreword

As Europe faces a major industrial and demographic transition, we must ensure that all talents are recognised, valued, and retained. Gender inclusion is no longer a marginal issue. Rather, it is a strategic necessity for industrial resilience, innovation, and performance.

In the EPS sector, as in much of manufacturing, women remain underrepresented — particularly in technical, production, and leadership roles. To better understand the situation, EUMEPS conducted an internal survey in early 2025, inviting women from across the EPS value chain to share their professional experiences. Structured around three open-ended questions, the survey gathered over 20 authentic and thoughtful responses. These insights confirm a shared reality: while the sector offers growing opportunities, persistent barriers still limit women’s visibility, progression, and leadership in the industry. All the while studies have, time and again, confirmed that companies with gender-balanced teams perform significantly better than those with less diversity.

Therefore, our engagement is neither about promoting one group over another, nor about comparing competency. “*Women of EUMEPS*” is about recognising the unique skills, perspectives and strengths that each individual brings. It is only through the combination of a variety of talents that we can enable more agile, motivated and resilient teams, which deliver better results.

At EUMEPS, we acknowledge that the private sector must evolve. We must create working environments that attract and retain talented women through concrete policies: inclusive hiring practices, flexible conditions, and active support for mentoring and professional development. We must address the “brain drain” that sees skilled women leaving our sector for others that offer greater support and balance. Especially within the public sector.

This publication is part of our broader “*Women of EUMEPS*” campaign, launched during the CIRPLEX Fair in Klagenfurt. The message of this campaign is simple. To paint a masterpiece, we require a full palette of colours. We believe that listening, learning from each other, and embracing the richness of diversity are key to long-term success in our industry.

We hope that this publication will inform, inspire and lead to greater collaboration between industry, institutions and civil society because building a more inclusive EPS sector means building a stronger, more sustainable Europe.

Jürgen Lang

Director General, EUMEPS



*To paint a masterpiece, we require a full palette of colours. We believe that listening, learning from each other, and embracing the richness of diversity are key to long-term success in our industry.”*



# Preface

It is a great honour to serve as the first female President of EUMEPS at a moment when our sector faces growing expectations to reconcile business performance with environmental responsibility – as it is at the heart of Europe’s transition towards economically feasible climate neutrality, circularity, and sustainable growth. In this context, promoting diversity is not a separate agenda goal – it is integral to building industrial ecosystems and value chains that are more resilient and competitive.

The authentic sustainability is the integration of economic, environmental and social dimensions.

Central to this social pillar is gender equality—not as a symbolic gesture, but as a practical necessity. The point is to create systems that value the different perspectives and strengths that individuals—regardless of gender—bring to the table. The real equality is the balance of shared experiences, competencies and talents – it results from cultures that champion mutual respect and professional development.

Sectors such as plastics and construction in Europe have made commendable progress toward gender inclusion, but more needs to be done - also to obtain stable access to the workforce.

This publication reflects our shared responsibility to support environments that enable equal opportunities for everyone. It provides a clear-eyed overview of where the EPS sector stands in terms of gender representation and what concrete steps we can take, together, to ensure broader participation

and equity. It also highlights success stories that show change is not only possible but already underway.

Synthos is an example of this approach and progress. We continuously take actions by providing equal opportunities for promotion and development. It results in the increase of women in top management positions. In comparison with the previous year, the number of women in top management positions has increased by 7%. The current parity is as follows: 45% of women and 55% of men.

Through my experience as a leader in both industry and association work, I am convinced that fostering gender inclusion is a matter of performance, credibility, and vision. If we want to shape the future of competitive and sustainable materials in Europe, we must ensure that the people driving this change represent the full spectrum of skills, perspectives, and experience our societies have to offer in order to achieve competitive business efficiency.

At Synthos, I have seen first-hand how much progress can be achieved when companies commit to responsible innovation. Whether by incorporating recycled content into high-performance EPS products or by investing in renewable energy and advanced recycling technologies, we are proving that sustainability and industrial excellence can go forward together.

Let this be the continuity of a wider and lasting transformation – within EUMEPS, across our member companies, and in partnership with policymakers and civil society.

Agata Gładysz-  
Stańczyk

President of EUMEPS  
– Vice President, BU  
Insulation Materials at  
Synthos



*Promoting diversity is part of how we build stronger, more resilient, and more innovative industrial value chains.”*



Reflection from MEP  
**Kamila Gasiuk-  
Pihowicz**  
Vice-chair of the  
Committee on the  
Internal Market and  
Consumer Protection.



“

Gender equality is a fundamental right and a matter of justice - but it is also a key driver of Europe's resilience and progress. As Europe deals with skills shortages, energy pressures, and the need for technological progress, we cannot overlook the contribution of half the population. Women need to be fully present and active in male-dominated, industrial and technological sectors at all levels - from skilled professionals to leaders and decision-makers in boardrooms.

Yet across the EU, only around 22 % of tech roles are filled by women, and despite women making up nearly half the workforce, they hold just about 1/3 of board seats in large companies - with even lower representation in countries without binding gender quotas. These gaps reflect untapped potential in shaping decisions and driving progress at a time when Europe cannot afford to overlook any talent.

I am committed to supporting legislation that ensures women have equal opportunities to contribute and lead, and that promotes positive change across all Member States. I believe that when businesses and policymakers move in the same direction, progress becomes more likely. We should continue to ensure that women play a central role in shaping Europe's industrial future - particularly in sectors undergoing major transformation, whether driven by environmental targets, technological shifts, or global competition. That means offering proper training and mentorship opportunities, supporting a better balance between work and family responsibilities, and encouraging fair recruitment and progression policies.

Equality should be integrated from the beginning - not treated as an afterthought”



1

# State of Play - Women in the EPS Sector. Where Do We Stand?



Women make up as little as  
**13%** of the plastics workforce  
in certain EU countries

and less than  
**15%** in technical or leadership  
roles, despite accounting  
for over half of Europe's science  
graduates.

## Persistent Underrepresentation in a Strategic Industrial Sector

Despite decades of advocacy and progress in some areas, the expanded polystyrene (EPS) sector – part of the broader European plastics industry – remains markedly male-dominated, particularly in technical, production, and leadership roles. According to older Eurostat estimates, women made up around 28.5% of the workforce in the rubber and plastics manufacturing sector across the EU. While this data is now outdated and covers a broader scope than EPS alone, it points to a clear gender imbalance that still persists.

To better understand the situation within the EPS sector specifically, EUMEPS launched an internal survey in early 2025, asking women three open-ended questions about their careers, challenges, and advice. This exercise has confirmed the clear underrepresentation of women in our industry – and highlighted the need to act.

These insights confirm a shared reality: while the sector offers growing opportunities, persistent barriers still limit women’s visibility, progression, and leadership in the industry. According to national observatories and industry studies, the share of women across the

plastics processing sector varies between 13% and 32%, depending on the country and segment.

In France, around 32% of the plastics workforce is female, a figure that has remained stable over the last decade (Polyvia, 2023). Germany reports 26.7% female participation in plastics processing, also with little change over recent years (Branchenanalyse Kunststoffverarbeitende Industrie, 2020). Italy lags further behind, with just 13% female participation in the industrial workforce overall. This rate is mirrored in the EPS segment (Techlamiera, 2024). This consistency across Member States reflects a Europe-wide trend: female representation in industrial manufacturing typically ranges between one-quarter and one-third. In the EPS sector, which combines manufacturing with technical and logistics-heavy roles, women remain significantly underrepresented.

### Horizontal and Vertical Segregation: A Persistent Dual Divide

A breakdown by job category reveals a structural divide. Women are heavily concentrated in administrative, HR and support roles. In France, over 80% of administrative positions in the plastics sector are held by women, while

production roles, making up nearly 60% of the sector, remain overwhelmingly male (Polyvia, 2023).

The situation is even more acute in technical and scientific functions. In R&D departments, chemical engineering, and production process supervision, female participation remains below 15% in most countries. A 2024 issue of *PLASTILIEN* reported that only 14% of management positions in the French plastics industry are held by women. This figure is emblematic of the “glass ceiling” that persists across the sector.

This dual segregation is both **horizontal** and **vertical**. The horizontal division



becomes apparent as women are often clustered in certain types of roles, while the vertical gap manifest in female underrepresentation at decision-making levels. While the pipeline of female talent in science and engineering is expanding (women now represent 52% of Europe’s science and technology graduates, Eurostat), their integration into the EPS industry remains limited and uneven.

## Structural Barriers Undermining Gender Balance

Several recurring factors explain the slow pace of change:

- **Persistent gender stereotypes** discourage girls and young women from pursuing technical and industrial careers. As noted in multiple testimonies collected by national industry groups, education systems often direct women away from production or materials engineering.
- **Working conditions** in industrial production, including EPS, such as shift patterns, physical demands, and remote site locations, can sometimes pose additional challenges for women—especially when combined with unequal distribution of domestic and care responsibilities.

- **The absence of female role models and mentors** reinforces perceptions of male exclusivity, especially in factory and technical environments. Studies consistently show that industries with few women in senior roles struggle to attract or retain new female talent.

**While our survey did not explicitly explore hiring practices**, several respondents raised concerns about balancing work and family life, particularly in roles involving shift work or site-based responsibilities. These reflections echo broader patterns observed across industry and underline the need for workplace environments that are mindful of different life circumstances. These barriers combine to limit not only the quantity but the visibility of women in the EPS industry. Many leave the sector after only a few years, contributing to a well-documented “leaky pipeline” in industrial careers.

## A Sector at a Turning Point?

Although progress has been modest, the past few years have seen the emergence of more targeted action. Corporate diversity targets, national

mentoring schemes (such as Industri’Elles in France), and new professional networks (Women in Plastics Italy) are beginning to reshape the conversation.

In parallel, the shift towards a circular, digital and low-carbon economy may serve as a catalyst. As the EPS industry invests in recycling innovation, material science, and system redesign, new roles are emerging, roles in which gender diversity can be actively built, rather than inherited.

Crucially, EU policy is also evolving. The Women on Boards Directive (2022/2381) sets a minimum target of 40% representation of the under-represented gender on non-executive boards in large companies by 2026. While not specific to the EPS sector, such legislation sends a strong signal: gender balance is not optional. It is a condition for responsible governance and sustainable competitiveness.





2

## Stakeholder Perspectives – Promoting Inclusion Across Institutions and Industry



**Promoting gender equality in the EPS sector is a shared responsibility — across industry, institutions, and civil society — to unlock Europe’s full potential in the green and digital transition.**

## Stakeholder Perspectives – Promoting Inclusion Across Institutions and Industry

Ensuring gender balance in Europe’s industrial sectors goes beyond a mere business imperative. It is a shared objective across public and private stakeholders. Institutions, policymakers and civil society all have a role to play in encouraging inclusive practices, improving access to technical careers, and supporting long-term professional development for women in manufacturing.

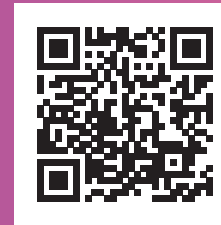
The EPS sector operates at the intersection of several EU policy priorities: the Green Deal, the industrial transition, the Skills Agenda, and gender equality strategies. As such, it is essential to hear from those working at the crossroads of these areas, both within EU institutions and among European associations supporting diversity in science, engineering and industry.



**Mary Collins,**  
Secretary General  
of the European  
Women’s Lobby



The European Women’s Lobby has recently launched a project ‘Women in Climate’\* with six of its member organisations as climate change not only impacts more on women, but they are also agents of change. Therefore, it is crucial that we work with industries such as yours to engage in dialogue to approach climate/environmental issues from a gender equality perspective across the spectrum. For gender equality to become a reality in Europe, we need all sectors—public and private—to act with conviction, towards gender equality and for the wellbeing of all. This includes industries that have historically been male-dominated. We welcome initiatives like Women of EUMEPS, which seek to take concrete steps to amplify women’s voices and challenge stereotypes from within the sector and are open for continuous dialogue towards sustainable environmental friendly solutions with women in the driving seat. But representation alone is not enough. Real change requires the commitment of industrial sectors to steer policies that enable women to thrive, be heard, and lead, especially in dialogue with the women’s movement. Gender-responsive budgeting, binding equality targets, and inclusive workplace practices are key. We invite industrial actors to join us in calling for such structural reforms at the EU and national levels.”



\* <https://womenlobby.org/women-in-climate/>





Voices from the  
Industry – Women of  
EUMEPS  
**Roxana Ghioca, CEO,**  
Austrotherm Romania

“

As a female leader in a predominantly male sector, I am focused on creating an inclusive work environment. I value professionalism and open minds, creativity and flexibility—not gender.

The construction industry, and particularly the EPS sector, offers many open possibilities for women: engineering, architecture, digital construction, and beyond.

After more than 19 years in this field, I’ve experienced market volatility, supply chain disruptions, and economic pressure—but I believe in strategic planning and resilience.

The demand for skilled professionals in the thermal insulation sector is growing, especially with Europe’s transition towards sustainable, safe, and beautiful buildings. There is a real place here for women, and the sector will only benefit from their increased presence.”



**Miriam Olivi**  
President of Women in  
Plastics Italy



In an industry that is often perceived as traditional, Women in Plastics Italy was founded to highlight the vital contribution of women and to foster a more inclusive, responsible and forward-looking culture across the plastics sector. Our goal is not only to support women’s professional development, but also to strengthen the sector’s role in delivering sustainability and innovation.

Through mentoring programmes, technical training, and open dialogue, we are building a space where collaboration and gender equality go hand in hand with industrial performance. I strongly believe that increasing the visibility and involvement of women helps shift perceptions and inspires a new generation to join this dynamic sector.

Plastics – and EPS in particular – have a real opportunity to reinvent their image. If we want to improve the social and environmental impact of our industry, we must ensure that diverse voices are not just heard, but actively shaping the future.”



**Verena Reichenecker,**  
CEO & President  
Molding Division at  
Storopack



At Storopack, we have always stood by one principle: we hire the best person for the job. But living up to that principle requires more than good intentions; it demands ongoing reflection and active monitoring of whether this mindset is truly embedded in the company culture.

Competence and professionalism have no gender. So don’t allow yourself or others to frame your values through a gendered lens.

Focus on what you do. Do it with passion. Do it with discipline. That’s what truly makes the difference.”



**Serena Klein,**  
Manager at IVH

“

The EPS industry is undoubtedly dominated by men. I think that's a great pity.

Studies from neuroscience, psychology and communication science show gender-specific differences in cognitive processes, decision-making and social interaction. Of course, these differences are not absolute and vary from person to person, and they are also influenced by cultural influences and experience. But generally speaking, to give just one example, women tend to pay more attention to co-operation, long-term strategies and social responsibility when making decisions.

Men, on the other hand, often favour more direct, risk-averse decision-making processes. Both approaches are right and important. And that's why we need more women, so that both sides of the coin are represented.

Different perspectives and ways of thinking contribute to more creative problem-solving and well-founded decisions. I would advise young women: Take the plunge! The rest of us women need you.”



**Marta Grochowska,**  
Marketing Manager  
at Yetico

“

I have been working in the EPS industry for nearly 3 years. When I started working in this sector, it was completely unfamiliar to me. My previous professional experience wasn't related to the EPS at all.

Nowadays, I am responsible for marketing and promotional activities in the EPS industry. The technical aspects of EPS industry, such as complex technological processes, physical and chemical properties of the material, and quality standards and norms, were the biggest challenges.

However, after getting to know the sector and its intricacies more closely, I find that working in the EPS industry gives me a lot of satisfaction, which I consider my personal success.

Don't be afraid of this highly specialized sector. You can learn whatever you wish. Patience and the willingness to broaden your horizons are the key to success. What's more, don't be afraid to learn from experienced colleagues.”





3

# Recommendations – Building a Stronger EPS Sector through Diversity, Inclusion and Equality



## Diversity, Inclusion and Equality.

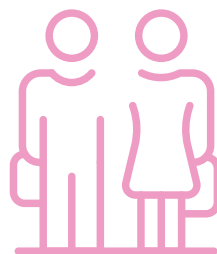
More than ideals.

Strategic levels for a stronger, more innovative and future-ready EPS industry.



At Women of EUMEPS, we believe that diversity, inclusion, and equality are not peripheral ambitions. For us they are the foundation of a stronger, more resilient, and more innovative EPS industry. These values are fully aligned with the EU's political priorities, from the Green Deal to the European Skills Agenda and the Gender Equality Strategy.

The following recommendations reflect our commitment to these values and translate them into tangible proposals for industry actors, policymakers, and training institutions alike.



## Diversity – Mobilising All Talents for Innovation and Resilience

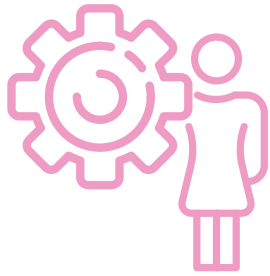
A diverse workforce brings together unique perspectives and complementary skills, strengthening the industry's ability to adapt, innovate, and lead.

### Recommendations for Industry

- Encourage gender inclusion targets not only in leadership and technical roles, but also in production—where many well-paid positions remain male-dominated. Measures such as flexible working hours, childcare support, and gender-sensitive job design can make these roles more accessible to women and improve retention.
- Promote female visibility through internal campaigns, leadership opportunities, and corporate communications.
- Partner with universities and technical schools to attract a more diverse pipeline of candidates, especially in engineering, chemistry, and project management.

### Recommendations for Policymakers

- Support co-funded schemes for mentoring and inclusive training in industry.
- Integrate gender diversity criteria in innovation and industrial funding programmes.
- Recognise and promote initiatives that showcase gender-balanced innovation in traditionally male-dominated sectors.



## Inclusion – Ensuring Women Can Enter, Thrive and Lead

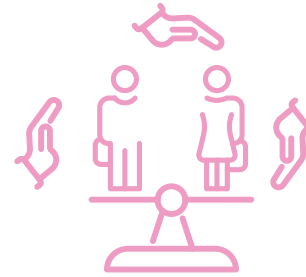
Inclusion is not automatic. It requires proactive measures, adapted policies, and visible commitment—especially in sectors where women remain underrepresented.

### Recommendations for Industry

- Audit HR policies to ensure access to flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and inclusive career progression models.
- Create and support internal women’s networks, mentorship programmes, and structured onboarding pathways.
- Provide leadership training and upskilling opportunities targeted at underrepresented groups.

### Recommendations for Policymakers

- Promote inclusive labour policies through EU directives and national legislation, particularly in industrial regions.
- Strengthen cooperation between equality bodies and industrial stakeholders.
- Ensure gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the EPBD, PPWR and Clean Industrial Deal frameworks.



## Equality – Making Equal Opportunities a Structural Reality

Equality is more than a principle—it is a driver of growth, productivity, and European competitiveness. But too many barriers still prevent women from advancing in industry.

### Recommendations for Industry

- Ensure gender-balanced shortlists for leadership roles and board positions.
- Include diversity and inclusion metrics in annual CSR or ESG reporting.
- Embed gender equality in sustainability strategies and innovation roadmaps.

### Recommendations for Policymakers

- Monitor and enforce the **Women on Boards Directive**, especially within industrial companies and sectoral associations.
- Introduce gender impact assessments for EU climate and industrial strategies.
- Support national awareness campaigns that redefine the image of industrial careers and promote gender-balanced leadership.

**Diversity, Inclusion, Equality**, our values, are not abstract ideals. They are practical levers to build a sector that is not only more just, but also more performant, more attractive, and more future-ready.

**Women of EUMEPS** stands ready to work with all stakeholders to turn these values into action.



# 4

## Conclusion – Building the Foundations of an Inclusive Industrial Future

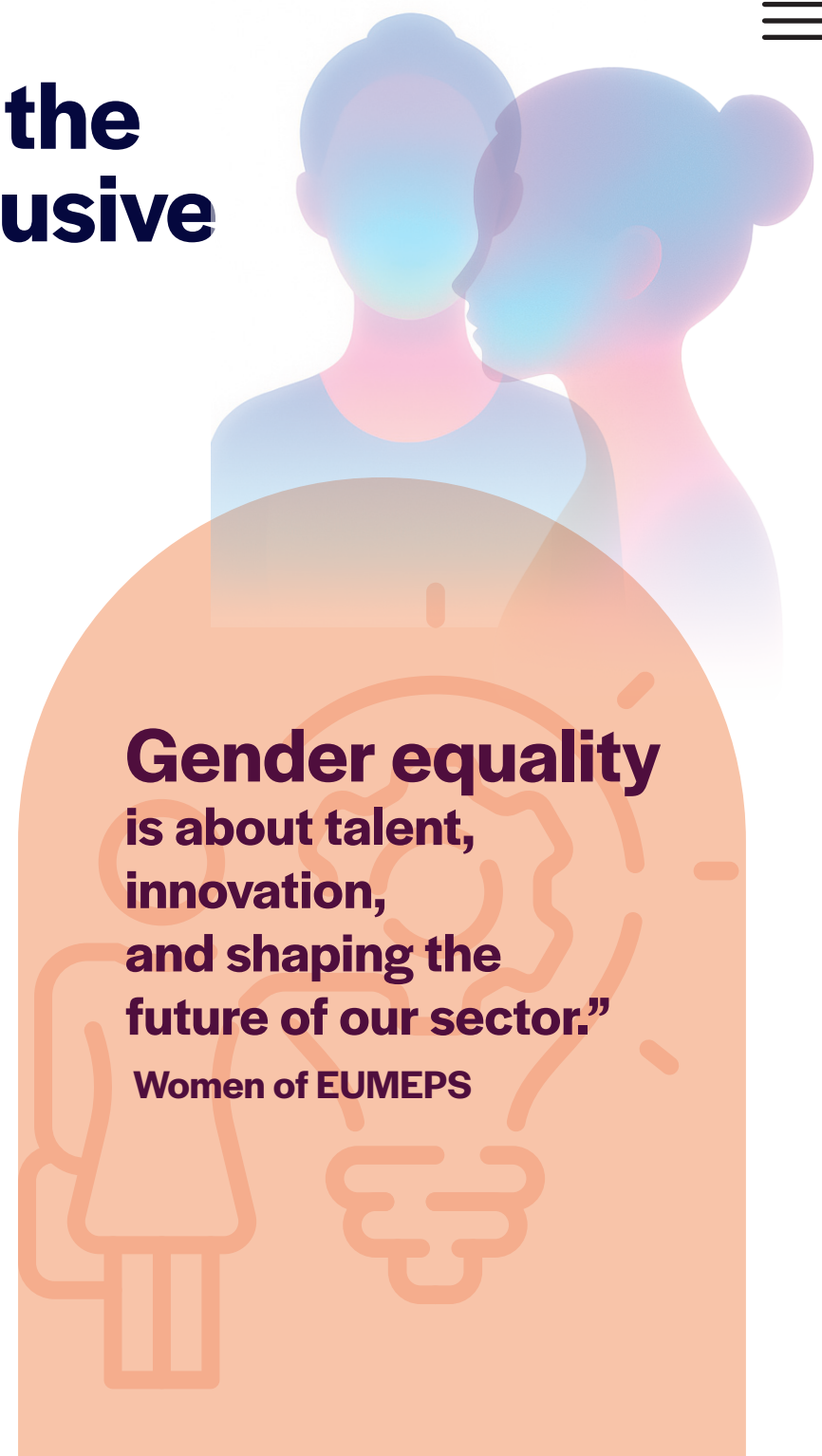
The challenges outlined in this publication are neither new nor unique to the EPS sector. What makes the difference is our willingness to act. With Women of EUMEPS, our industry is taking a deliberate step forward towards greater visibility, stronger inclusion, and more balanced opportunities for women across the value chain.

Gender equality is not simply a matter of representation. It is about recognising talent, fostering innovation, and ensuring that all voices contribute to the evolution of our sector. This is particularly critical in times of change: as Europe undergoes a dual green and digital transition, we cannot afford to ignore half of the talent pool.

At EUMEPS, we believe that the path to industrial resilience goes hand in hand with greater inclusivity. That is why we are committed to strengthening cooperation between companies, institutions and civil society, and to embedding the values of **diversity, inclusion, and equality** at the core of how we work.

We call on EU policymakers, national governments and industry partners to support this transformation through policy, funding, and dialogue. Together, let us build a sector where women are not only present but empowered to lead. A sector that is not only efficient and sustainable, but fair, future-ready, and representative of the European society it serves.

The foundations have been laid. Now is the time to build upon them, together!



**Gender equality is about talent, innovation, and shaping the future of our sector.”**  
**Women of EUMEPS**



**“As a female leader in a predominantly male sector, I am focused on an inclusive work environment, I value professionalism and open minds, creativity and flexibility, not taking into consideration gender differences”.**  
 – Roxana Ghioca (Austrotherm)

**“A job done with commitment and tenacity is always recognised”.**  
 – Raquel López de la Banda (ANAPE)

**“Being a young woman at the start of your career is challenging. A positive mindset, open mind and resilience will get you far!”**  
 – Liv Olsson (BEWI)

**“Women tend to pay more attention to co-operation, long-term strategies and social responsibility when making decisions”.**  
 – Serena Klein (IVH)

**“Good ideas, good will and skill know no gender differences.”**  
 – Silvia Sgarzi (AIPE)



**WOMEN OF EUMEPS**

**“Embrace the challenge, stay curious and take the chance to shape the future of sustainable products that make a meaningful impact on everyday life.”**  
 – Michaela Andritsch (HIRSCH Servo)

**“My advice to young women interested in the EPS industry would be to have confidence and embrace new ideas and thinking”.**  
 – Angela Fredericks (BPF)

**“Stay true to yourself and consciously promote what is best for you—your lifestyle, your career, your ambitions.”**  
 – Annette Schäfer (EUMEPS)

